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(54) **COLLECTION MANAGEMENT DATABASE OF ARBITRARY SCHEMA**

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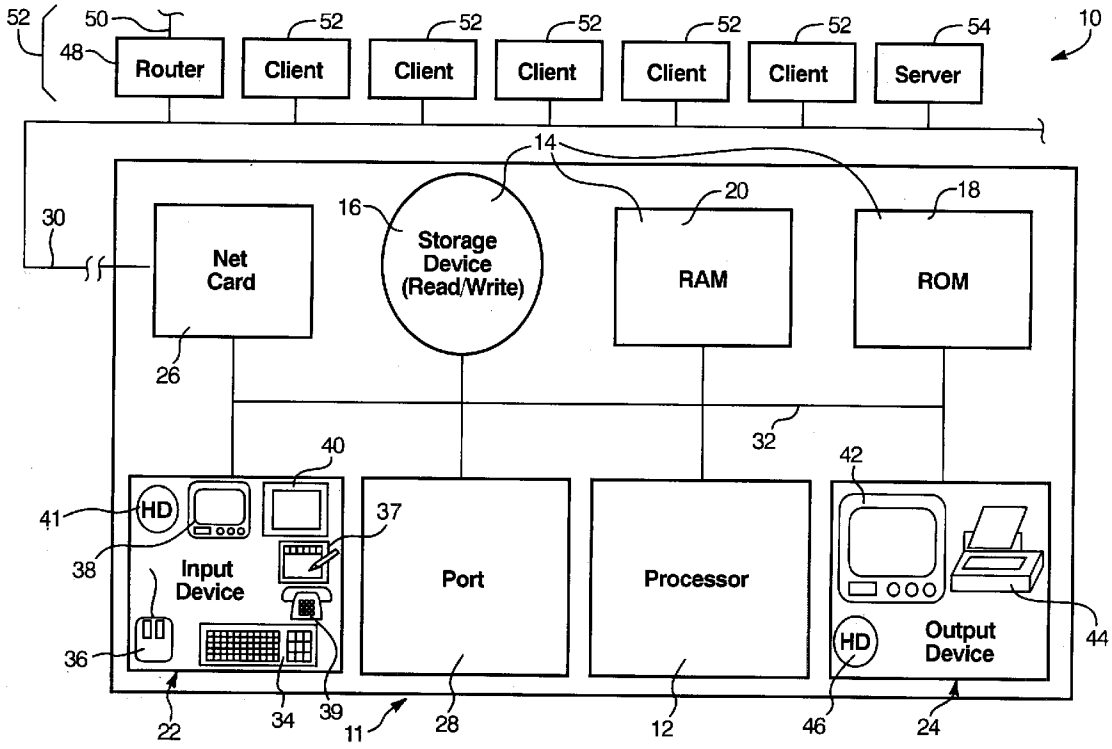
(57) **ABSTRACT**

Apparatus and methods for deterministically classifying and indexing objects that are perceived arbitrarily and subjectively, such as digital media and file representations of photographs, in a database. A user establishes various personalized descriptive category sets to organize media, such as digital photographs, video, and audio. The descriptive category sets include categories to describe some aspect or attribute of the objects of the user. Each category may be arbitrarily definable and contain a finite number of descriptors, constituting values within the category. Objects are entered into collections by filtering the objects according to the descriptors of the descriptive category set. A user may thus arbitrarily define a schema of classification according to perceptions, links, experiences, and the like, according to the subjective memory, vocabulary, and mental connections of a user.



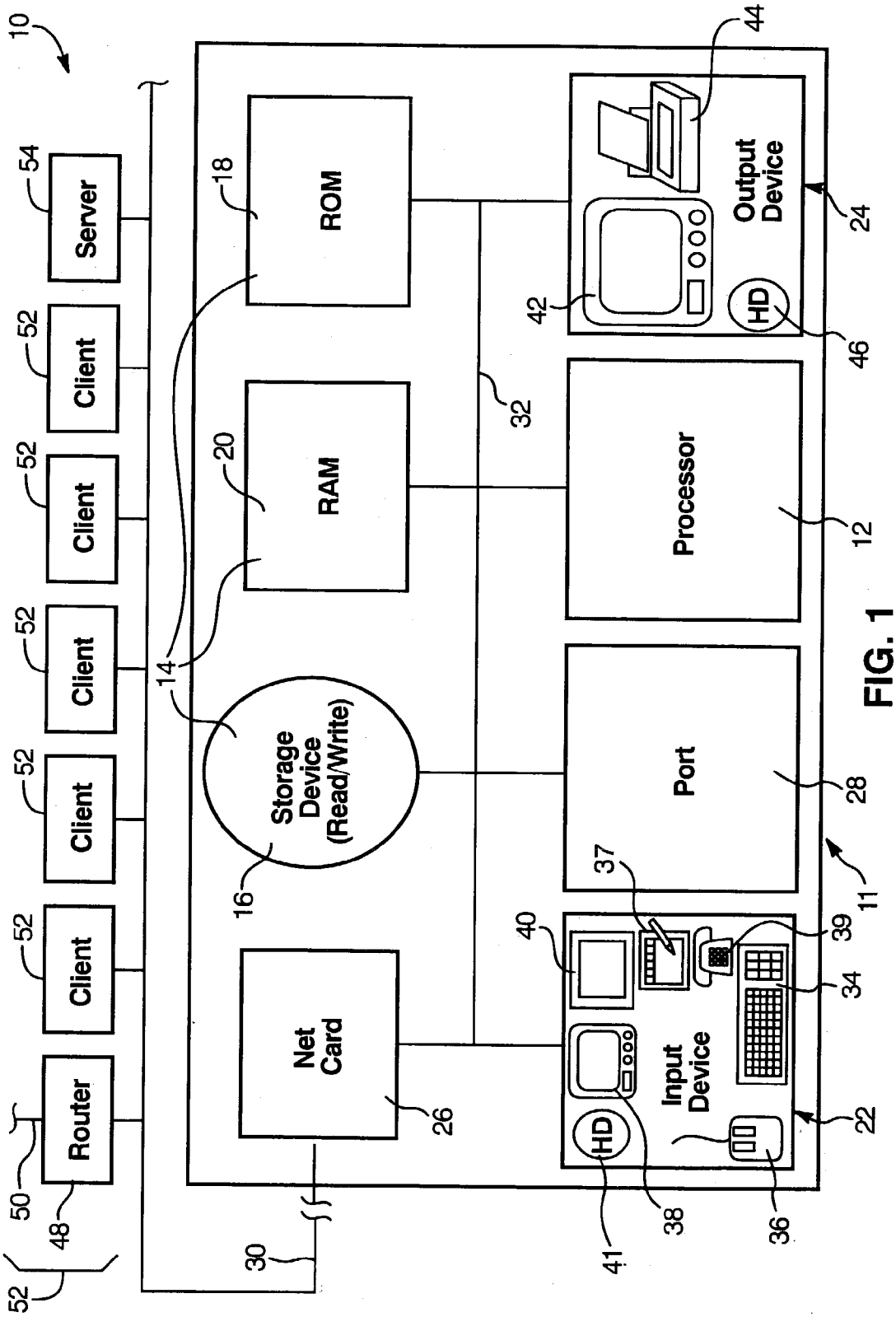

10
Server
54
Client
52
Client
52
Client
52
Client
52
Client
52
Client
52
Router
50
48
52
ROM
18
RAM
20
14
Storage Device (Read/Write)
16
Net Card
26
30
32
Output Device
24
42
HD
46
44
Processor
12
Port
28
37
39
11
40
34
Input Device
22
HD
41
38
36

FIG. 1

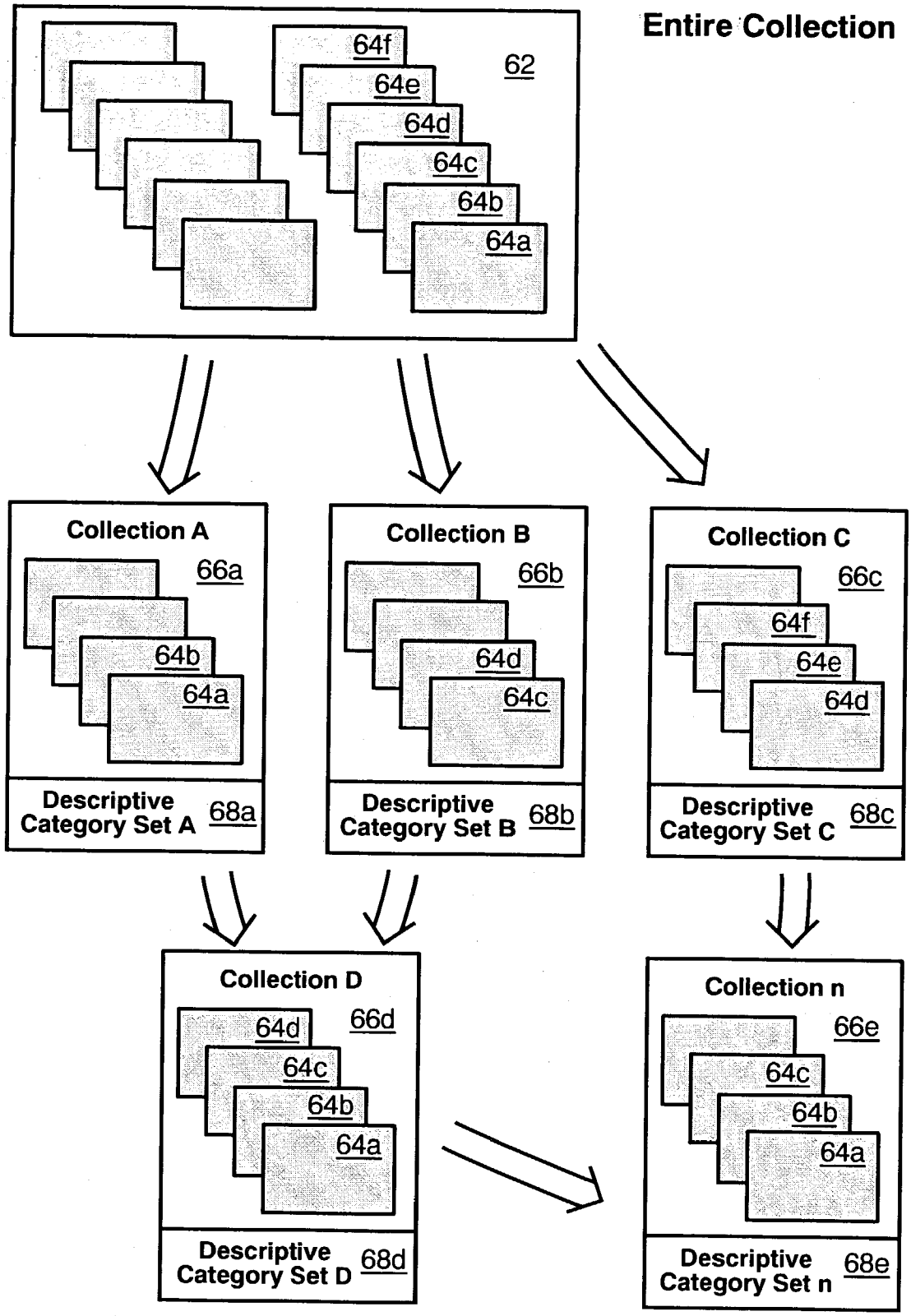

Entire Collection
62
64f
64e
64d
64c
64b
64a
Collection A
66a
64b
64a
Descriptive Category Set A
68a
Collection B
66b
64d
64c
Descriptive Category Set B
68b
Collection C
66c
64f
64e
64d
Descriptive Category Set C
68c
Collection D
66d
64d
64c
64b
64a
Descriptive Category Set D
68d
Collection n
66e
64c
64b
64a
Descriptive Category Set n
68e

FIG. 2

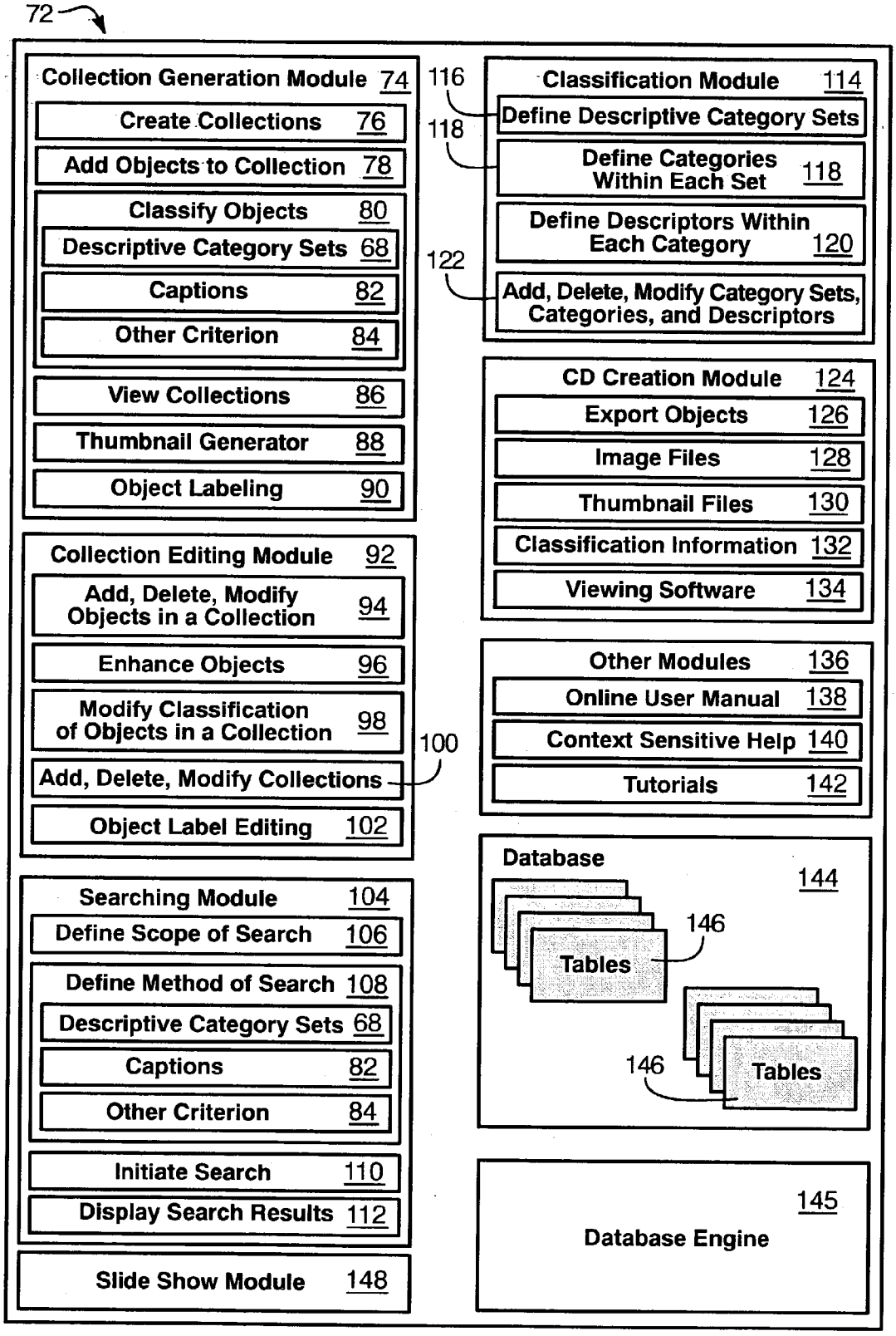

72
Collection Generation Module 74
Create Collections 76
Add Objects to Collection 78
Classify Objects 80
Descriptive Category Sets 68
Captions 82
Other Criterion 84
View Collections 86
Thumbnail Generator 88
Object Labeling 90
Collection Editing Module 92
Add, Delete, Modify Objects in a Collection 94
Enhance Objects 96
Modify Classification of Objects in a Collection 98
Add, Delete, Modify Collections
100
Object Label Editing 102
Searching Module 104
Define Scope of Search 106
Define Method of Search 108
Descriptive Category Sets 68
Captions 82
Other Criterion 84
Initiate Search 110
Display Search Results 112
Slide Show Module 148
116
118
122
Classification Module 114
Define Descriptive Category Sets
Define Categories Within Each Set 118
Define Descriptors Within Each Category 120
Add, Delete, Modify Category Sets, Categories, and Descriptors
CD Creation Module 124
Export Objects 126
Image Files 128
Thumbnail Files 130
Classification Information 132
Viewing Software 134
Other Modules 136
Online User Manual 138
Context Sensitive Help 140
Tutorials 142
Database 144
146
Tables
146
Tables
145
Database Engine

FIG. 3

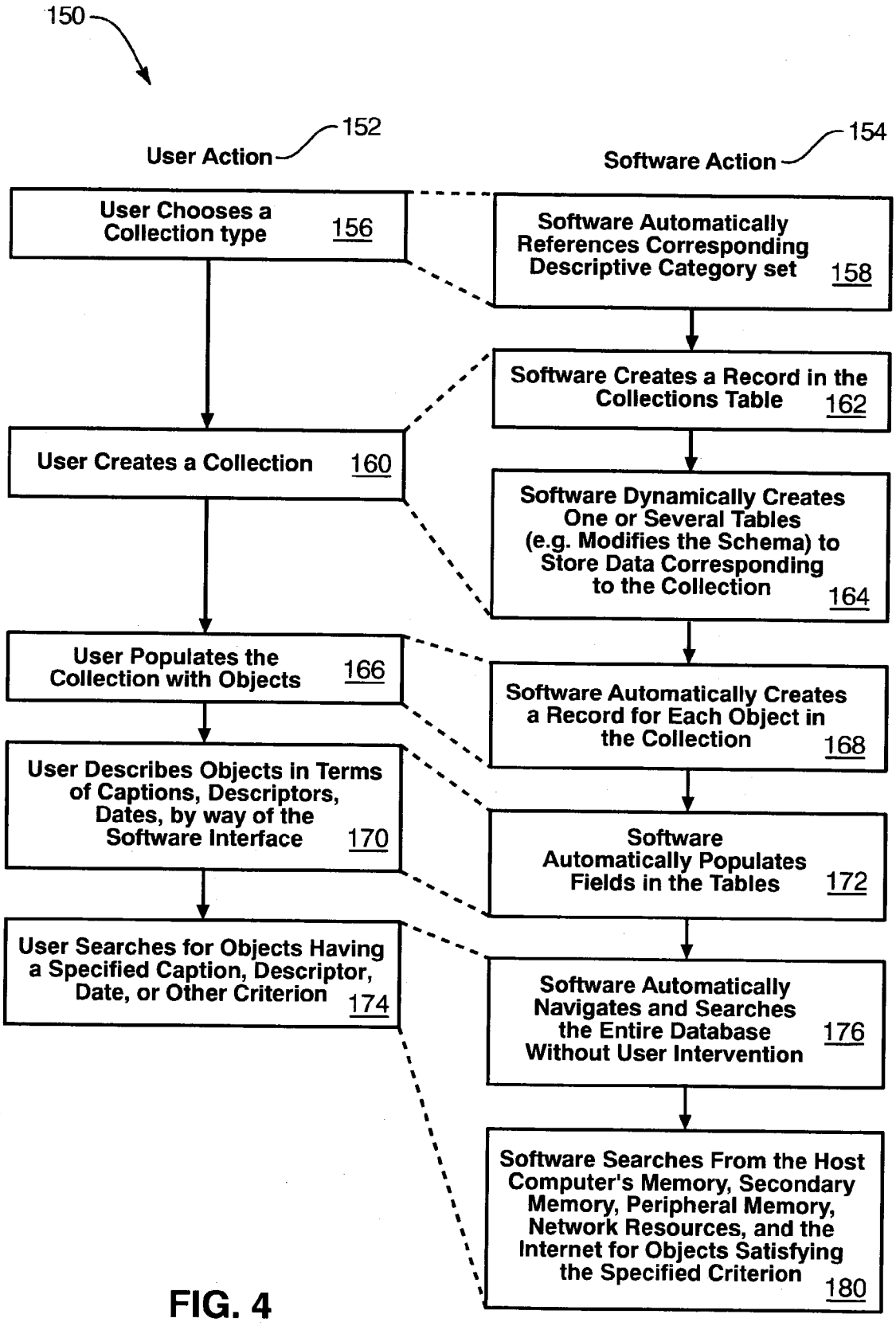

150
User Action
152
Software Action
154
User Chooses a Collection type 156
Software Automatically References Corresponding Descriptive Category set 158
Software Creates a Record in the Collections Table 162
User Creates a Collection 160
Software Dynamically Creates One or Several Tables (e.g. Modifies the Schema) to Store Data Corresponding to the Collection 164
User Populates the Collection with Objects 166
Software Automatically Creates a Record for Each Object in the Collection 168
User Describes Objects in Terms of Captions, Descriptors, Dates, by way of the Software Interface 170
Software Automatically Populates Fields in the Tables 172
User Searches for Objects Having a Specified Caption, Descriptor, Date, or Other Criterion 174
Software Automatically Navigates and Searches the Entire Database Without User Intervention 176
Software Searches From the Host Computer's Memory, Secondary Memory, Peripheral Memory, Network Resources, and the Internet for Objects Satisfying the Specified Criterion 180

FIG. 4

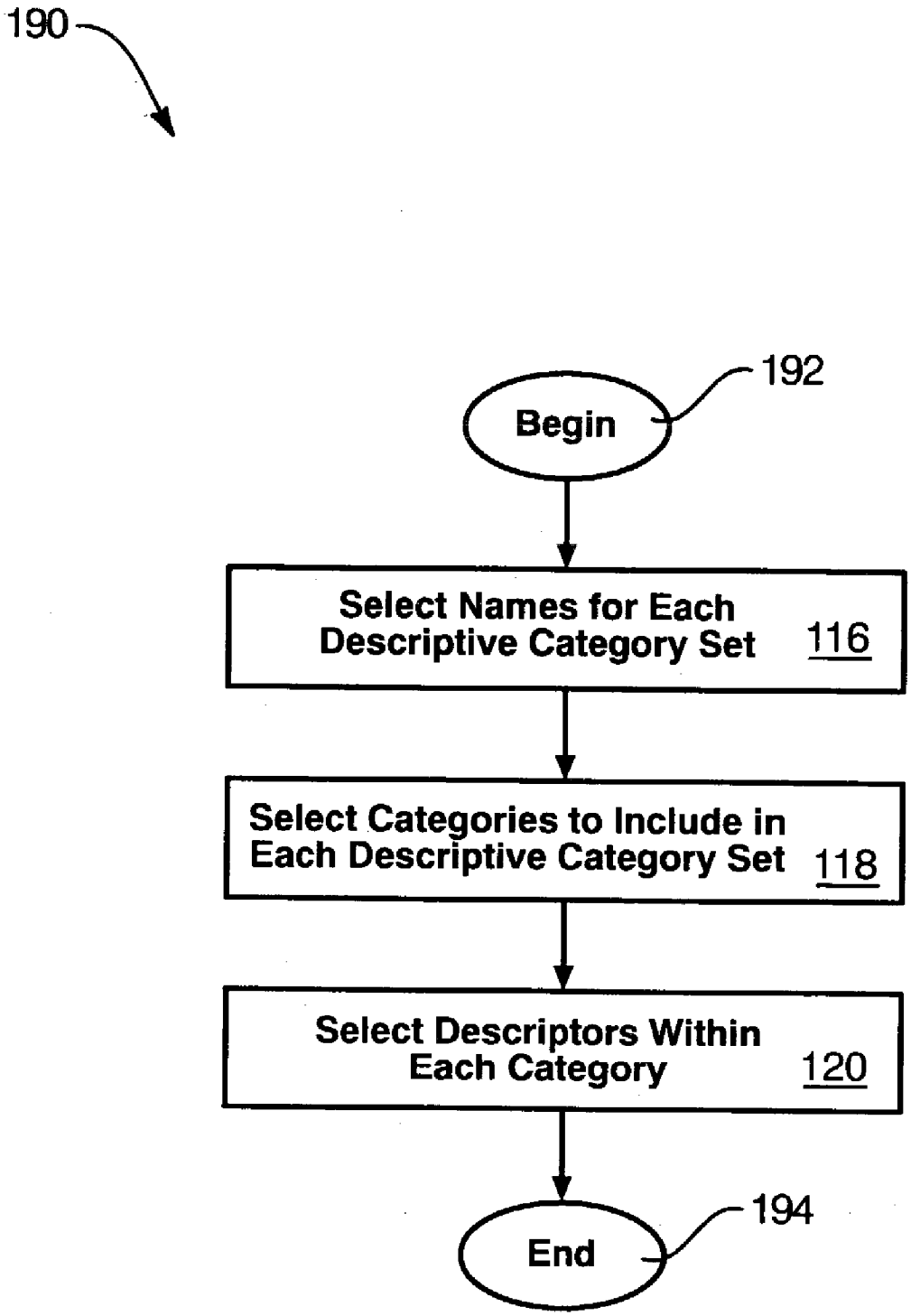

190
192
Begin
Select Names for Each Descriptive Category Set 116
Select Categories to Include in Each Descriptive Category Set 118
Select Descriptors Within Each Category 120
194
End

FIG. 5

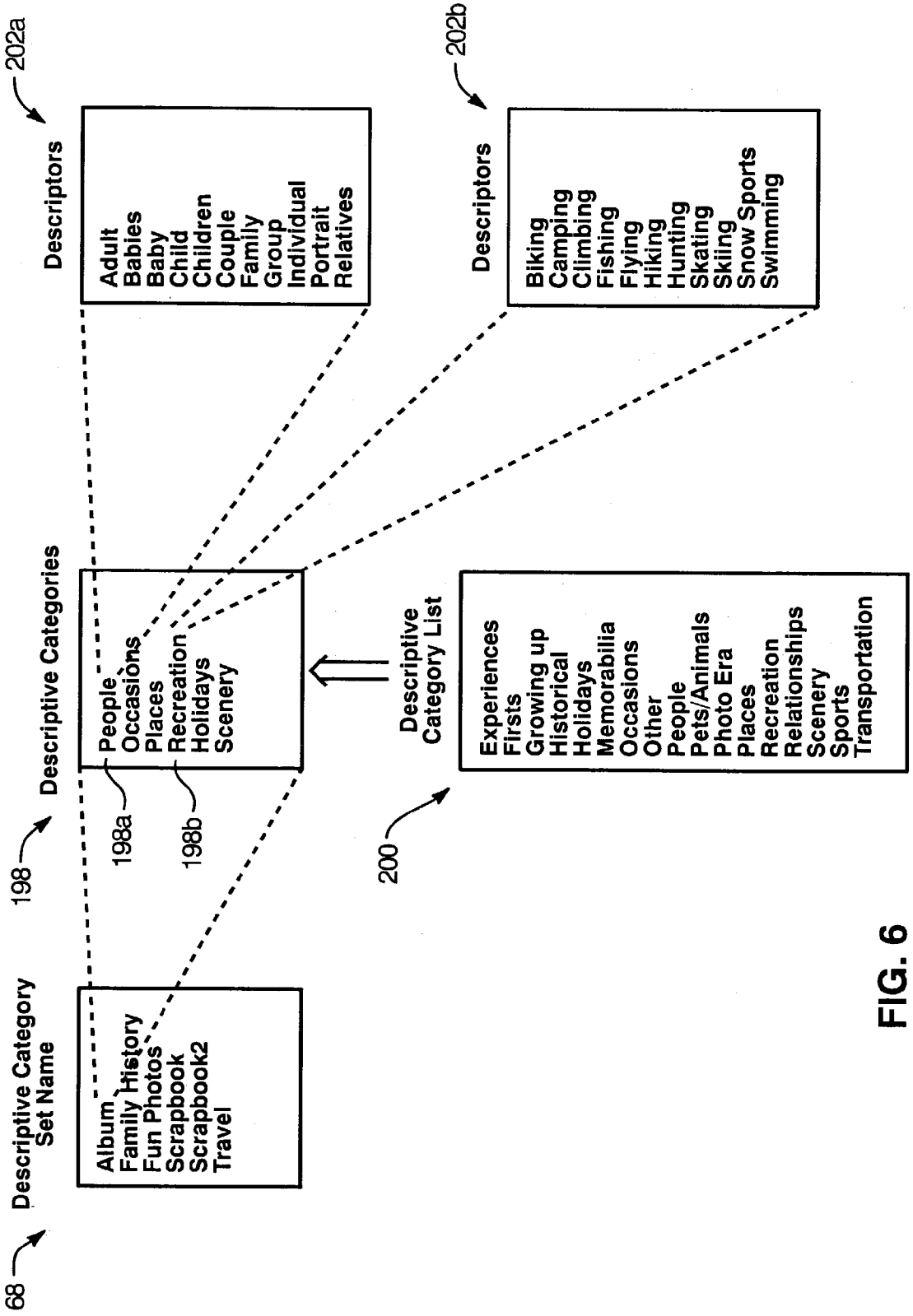

68
Descriptive Category Set Name
Album
Family History
Fun Photos
Scrapbook
Scrapbook2
Travel
198
Descriptive Categories
People
Occasions
Places
Recreation
Holidays
Scenery
198a
198b
200
Descriptive Category List
Experiences
Firsts
Growing up
Historical
Holidays
Memorabilia
Occasions
Other
People
Pets/Animals
Photo Era
Places
Recreation
Relationships
Scenery
Sports
Transportation
202a
Descriptors
Adult
Babies
Baby
Child
Children
Couple
Family
Group
Individual
Portrait
Relatives
202b
Descriptors
Biking
Camping
Climbing
Fishing
Flying
Hiking
Hunting
Skating
Skiing
Snow Sports
Swimming

FIG. 6

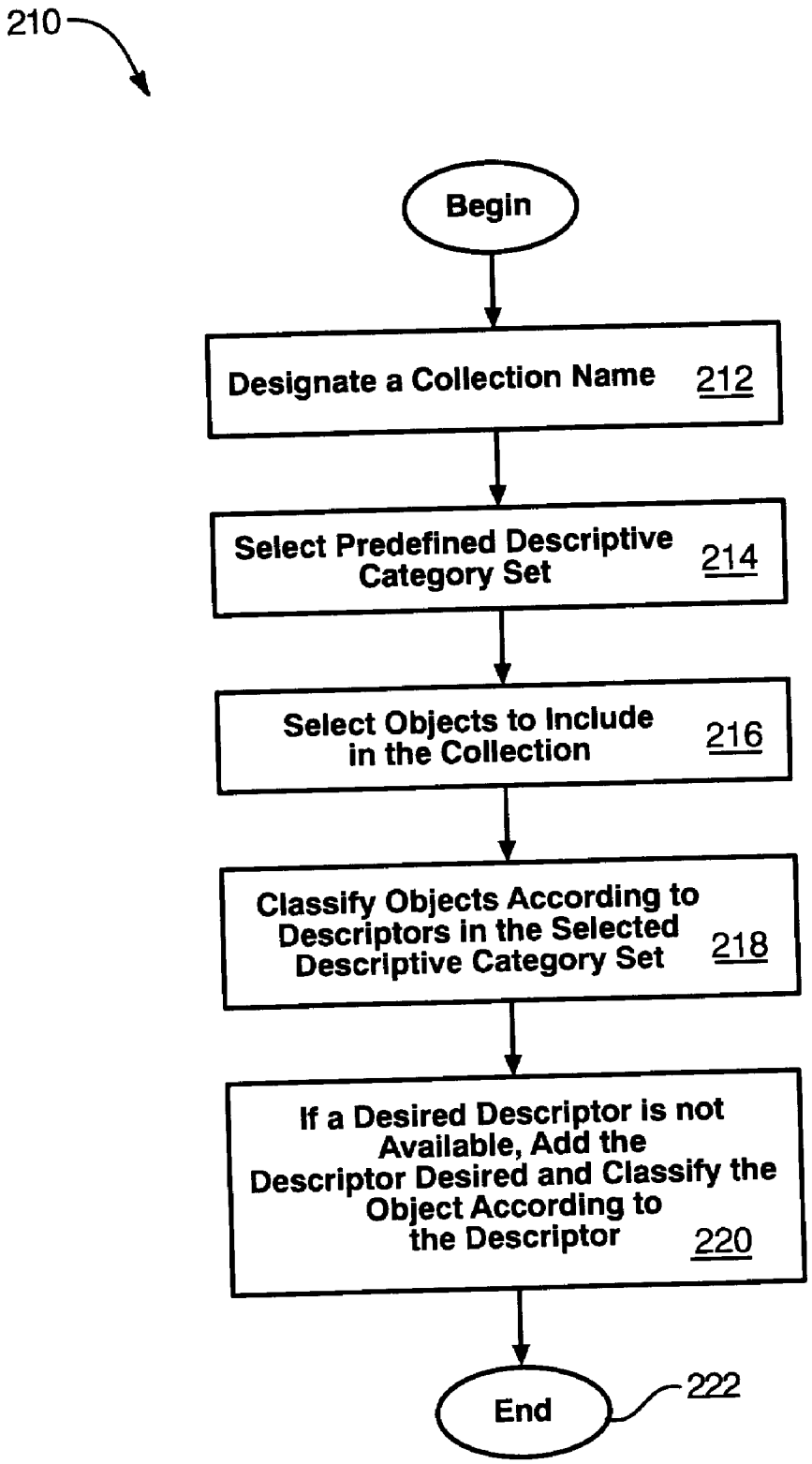

210
Begin
Designate a Collection Name 212
Select Predefined Descriptive Category Set 214
Select Objects to Include in the Collection 216
Classify Objects According to Descriptors in the Selected Descriptive Category Set 218
If a Desired Descriptor is not Available, Add the Descriptor Desired and Classify the Object According to the Descriptor 220
End
222

FIG. 7

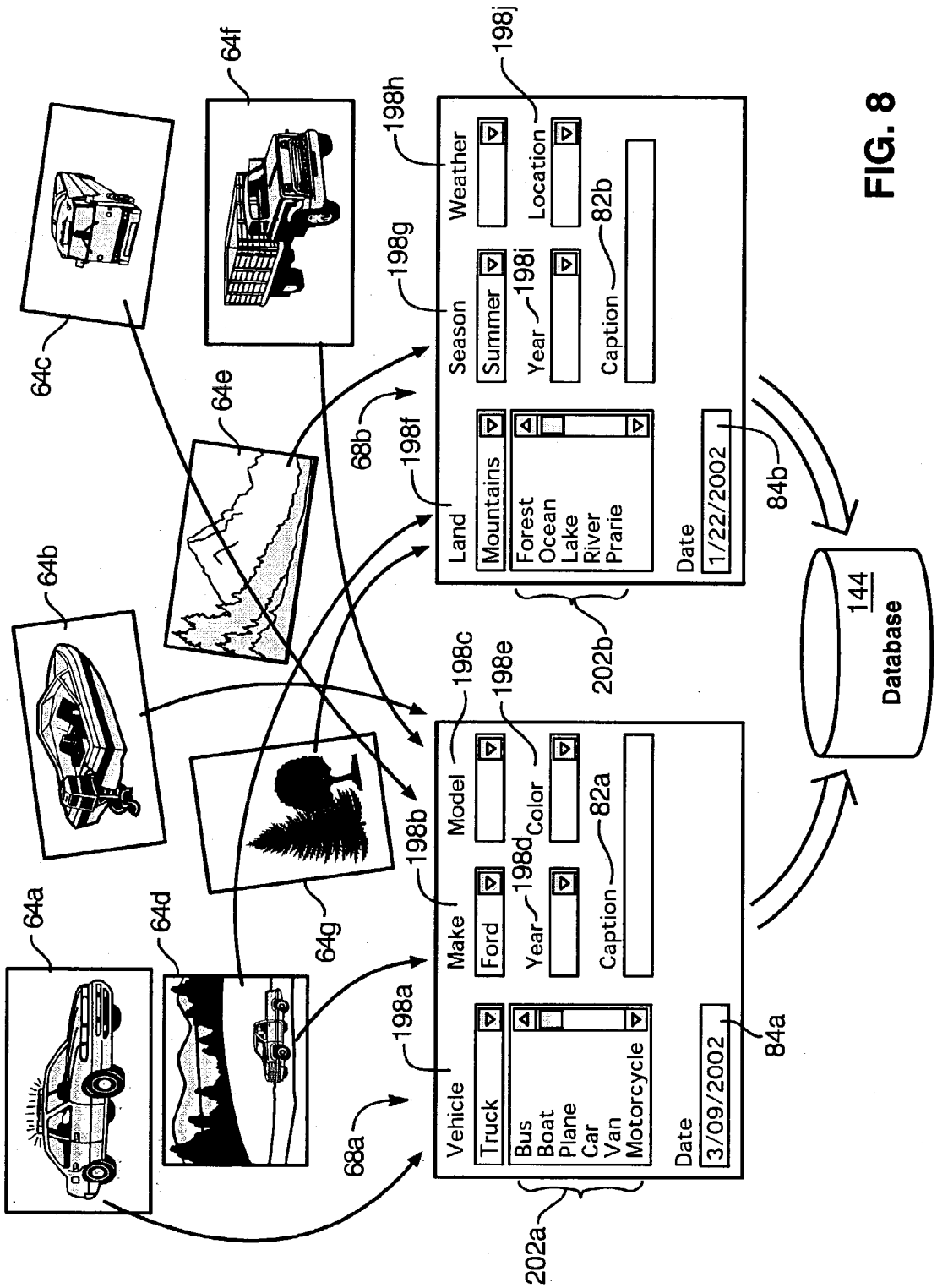

64a
64b
64c
64d
64e
64f
64g
68a
68b
198a
198b
198c
198d
198e
198f
198g
198h
198i
198j
Vehicle
Truck
Bus
Boat
Plane
Car
Van
Motorcycle
Make
Ford
Model
Color
Year
Caption
82a
Date
3/09/2002
84a
202a
Land
Mountains
Forest
Ocean
Lake
River
Prarie
Season
Summer
Weather
Location
Year
Caption
82b
Date
1/22/2002
84b
202b
144
Database

FIG. 8

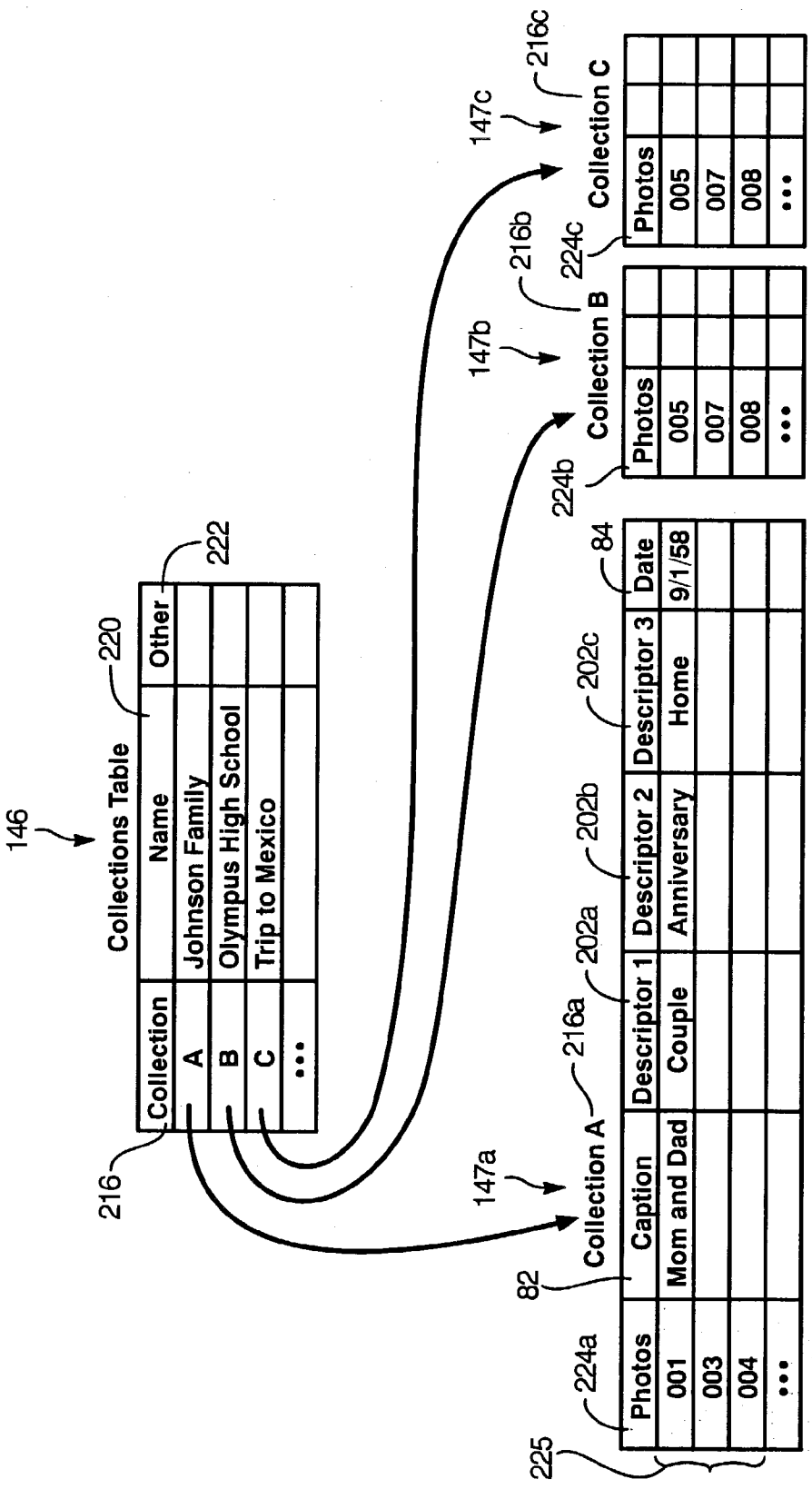

146
Collections Table
220
Collection
Name
Other
222
A
Johnson Family
B
Olympus High School
C
Trip to Mexico
216
147a
147b
147c
Collection A
216a
Collection B
216b
Collection C
216c
Caption
Descriptor 1
202a
Descriptor 2
202b
Descriptor 3
202c
Date
84
Mom and Dad
Couple
Anniversary
Home
9/1/58
82
Photos
224a
224b
224c
001
003
004
005
007
008
225

FIG. 9

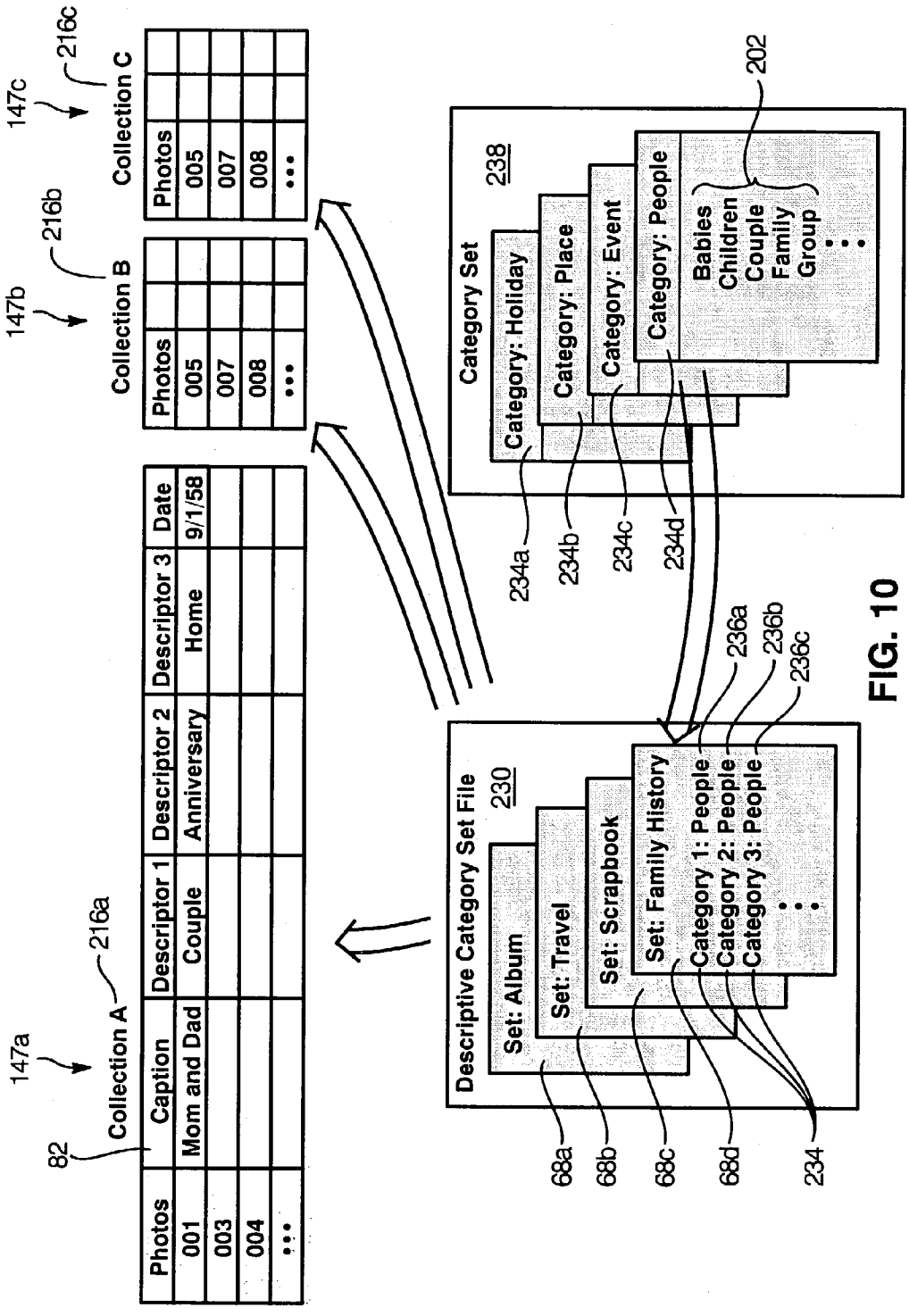

147a
82
Collection A
216a
Photos
Caption
Descriptor 1
Descriptor 2
Descriptor 3
Date
001
Mom and Dad
Couple
Anniversary
Home
9/1/58
003
004
147b
216b
Collection B
Photos
005
007
008
147c
216c
Collection C
Photos
005
007
008
Descriptive Category Set File
230
Set: Album
Set: Travel
Set: Scrapbook
Set: Family History
Category 1: People
Category 2: People
Category 3: People
68a
68b
68c
68d
234
236a
236b
236c
Category Set
238
Category: Holiday
Category: Place
Category: Event
Category: People
Babies
Children
Couple
Family
Group
202
234a
234b
234c
234d

FIG. 10

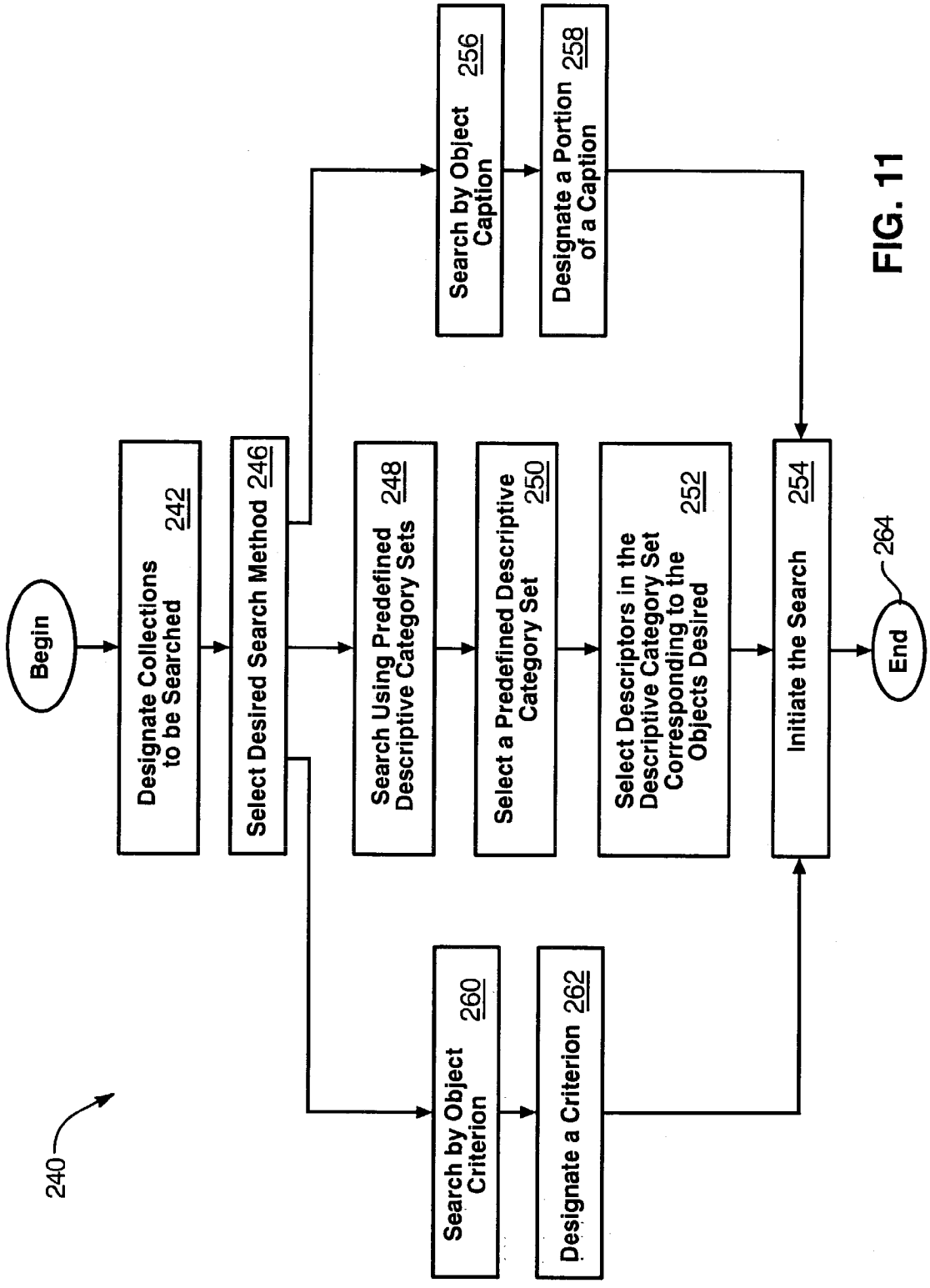

240
Begin
Designate Collections to be Searched 242
Select Desired Search Method 246
Search Using Predefined Descriptive Category Sets 248
Select a Predefined Descriptive Category Set 250
Select Descriptors in the Descriptive Category Set Corresponding to the Objects Desired 252
Initiate the Search 254
End 264
Search by Object Caption 256
Designate a Portion of a Caption 258
Search by Object Criterion 260
Designate a Criterion 262

FIG. 11

COLLECTION MANAGEMENT DATABASE OF ARBITRARY SCHEMA

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This patent application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/343,861 filed Dec. 21, 2001 and entitled Associative Distributed Database of Arbitrary Schema.

BACKGROUND

[0002] 1. The Field of the Invention

[0003] This invention relates to computer software and, more particularly, to novel systems and methods for organizing and retrieving objects such as digital photographs, images, audio recordings, video recordings, or other files stored in databases.

[0004] 2. The Background Art

[0005] The emergence and proliferation of electronic devices, such as digital cameras, video recorders, music players, and other computing devices, has made the storage of digital images, as well as other forms of digital video, audio, files, and the like, more common, inexpensive, and convenient. Due to the decreased expense and increased convenience, a user may acquire these types of media and files more easily and in increased numbers. With these increased numbers, means of organizing and cataloging the media in a manner that the media may be effectively catalogued, classified, searched, associated, and retrieved is an important issue.

[0006] Digital media organizers, albums, and the like, typically lack the power to effectively store, catalog, associate, and search vast numbers of media files or other files. Moreover, many include user interfaces that are nonintuitive, lack intuitive methods to organize the media, and do not provide a user the ability to easily configure and personalize the interface.

[0007] What is needed is an intuitive, easy to use, powerful database system to effectively catalog, store, associate, search, and retrieve digital media and files so that they are readily accessible and easily manipulated by an unsophisticated user.

[0008] What is further needed is a method to arbitrarily classify and associate photographs with key words and phrases that may be selected and personalized by a user on the fly, on any "soft" or hard basis (e.g., logic), thereby providing the features and advantages of an associative database and yet of a pseudo "artificial intelligence" or "fuzzy logic" connection scheme (e.g. association). Moreover, what is further needed is a powerful search engine which may quickly locate photographs according to predefined search parameters corresponding to the keys words and phrases previously selected obtaining the benefit of highly deterministic systems, yet benefitting from the highly developed, inherent, "fuzzy logic" types of associations available to a user by virtue of the normal operation of the human brain.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] A primary object of the present invention is to provide apparatus and methods for deterministically classifying and indexing objects, such as digital media and files, in a database, by a user based on deterministic and highly arbitrary and fuzzy logic of a user's mind. A user may be provided a database, such as a relational or associative database. The database may be dynamically expandable as needed as a user desires to add and organize additional media to a collection. At the outset, the invention recognizes that many associations and decisions are used naturally by the mind to discriminate between (sort) various objects, especially something with so many complex memories bound to it, like a photograph has. Although digital photographs are referred to repeatedly in the body of this specification, one of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that apparatus and methods in accordance with the invention may be used to organize, associate, and store other digital media and objects such as images, digital video recordings, digital audio recordings, digital text files, and the like, and are intended to be captured within the scope of the present invention.

[0010] A user may configure and set up a database in accordance with the invention without having expertise and training in database systems. Apparatus and methods in accordance with the invention may provide a user the ability to establish various descriptive category sets to organize the media. For example, a user may create a descriptive category set with one or a plurality of categories to categorize a group of objects unique to the user. Each category may by used to describe some aspect or attribute of the objects. In addition, each category may be arbitrarily definable by a user to contain a finite number of descriptors, constituting values within the category.

[0011] Once a user has established descriptive category sets according to an organization scheme selected by the user, a user may select objects, such as digital media and files, having attributes perceived by a user to correspond to the descriptive category set. Each object may be uniquely identifiable by a user and also be identified by a unique identifier retrievable by a computer (e.g. file name, etc.). The user may then select a descriptive category set that he or she considers to correspond to the perceived attributes of the objects. A user may create sets by the user's own mental associations and define categories, sets, and fields with words arbitrarily selected due to their unique significance to the user.

[0012] The user may create a collection of objects having a collection name and the collection may be characterized by a type corresponding to the selected descriptive category set. Once the collection is established, the user may enter objects into the collection by linking selected ones of the objects with the collection name and by filtering the objects according to correspondence of the attributes of the objects to the descriptors of the descriptive category set. The correspondence of the attributes to the descriptors perceived by a user may be highly subjective and seemingly arbitrary. Nevertheless, a user is typically relying on a complex schema of mentally associated characteristics and memories associated with a picture.

[0013] Once the objects have been linked to the descriptors, information identifying the descriptors, categories, and the selected category set may be stored in a database. This information may facilitate future searching for collections, or objects in the collections.

[0014] In certain embodiments, the descriptive category set may be modified to include additional categories "on the fly" in response to the presentation of a new object having attributes not conforming to any of the available categories, or having attributes that are better described with an additional or alternate category. These may change as a user's mind considers, consciously or subconsciously, over time the object (e.g., photograph) in the context of memories and significance it elicits due to mental associations. Likewise, additional descriptors may be added to any or all of the descriptive categories to better describe an object included in a collection.

[0015] Apparatus and methods in accordance with the invention may provide for searching for collections or objects in a collection using a descriptive category set. A user may select a search criteria such as a descriptor, category, or set, perceived by a user and defined thereby to correspond to attributes of desired objects. In accordance with the invention, the user may then initiate a search of the objects according to the search criteria. The desired objects may then be retrieved to create a subset of the objects corresponding to the search criteria.

[0016] Apparatus and methods in accordance with the invention may provide the ability to browse objects in any or all of the collections. In addition, the descriptors, categories, or descriptive category set of a specific object may be modified when entering an object into a collection, browsing a collection, or after searching the collections. Additionally, information used to index and categorize the objects need not be limited to the descriptive category set, categories, and descriptors. Each object in a collection may be indexed and identified with other information arbitrarily selected by a user for a reason unique to the user such as captions, dates, events, and the like.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0017] The objects and features of the present invention will become more fully apparent from the following description, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. Understanding that these drawings depict only typical embodiments of the invention and are, therefore, not to be considered limiting of its scope, the invention will be described with additional specificity and detail through use of the accompanying drawings in which:

[0018] **FIG. 1** is a schematic block diagram of one embodiment of computer hardware that may be used to implement an apparatus and method in accordance with the invention;

[0019] **FIG. 2** is a schematic block diagram illustrating one embodiment of a creation process for creating collections associating a group of objects;

[0020] **FIG. 3** is a schematic block diagram of one embodiment of modules included in a collection management system in accordance with the invention;

[0021] **FIG. 4** is a flow diagram of one embodiment of user actions and corresponding software actions in accordance with the invention;

[0022] **FIG. 5** is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of a process whereby descriptive category sets may be created to categorize objects in accordance with the invention;

[0023] **FIG. 6** is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of descriptive category sets, descriptive categories, and descriptors used to categorize objects;

[0024] **FIG. 7** is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of a process for classifying objects to be included in a collection;

[0025] **FIG. 8** is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of a process for filtering objects with respect to several descriptive category sets in accordance with the invention;

[0026] **FIG. 9** is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of the organization of data in database tables in accordance with the invention;

[0027] **FIG. 10** is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of the organization of descriptive category sets, categories, and descriptors in database tables in accordance with the invention; and

[0028] **FIG. 11** is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of a process for searching for objects categorized in accordance with the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0029] It will be readily understood that the components of the present invention, as generally described and illustrated in **FIGS. 1 through 11** herein, could be arranged and designed in a wide variety of different configurations. Thus, the description herein is not intended to limit the scope of the invention, but is merely representative of certain presently preferred embodiments of devices and systems in accordance with the invention. Those of ordinary skill in the art will, of course, appreciate that various modifications to the details herein may easily be made without departing from the essential characteristics of the invention, as described. Thus, the following information is intended only by way of example, and simply illustrates certain presently preferred embodiments consistent with the invention.

[0030] The presently preferred embodiments of the invention will be best understood by reference to the drawings, wherein like parts are designated by like numerals throughout.

[0031] Referring to **FIG. 1**, an apparatus **10** may implement the invention on one or more nodes **11**, (client **11**, computer **11**) containing a processor **12** (CPU **12**). All components may exist in a single node **11** or may exist in multiple nodes **11**, **52** remote from one another. The CPU **12** may be operably connected to a memory device **14**. A memory device **14** may include one or more devices such as a hard drive or other non-volatile storage device **16**, a read-only memory **18** (ROM **18**) and a random access (and usually volatile) memory **20** (RAM **20** or operational memory **20**).

[0032] The apparatus **10** may include an input device **22** for receiving inputs from a user or from another device. Similarly, an output device **24** may be provided within the node **11**, or accessible within the apparatus **10**. A network card **26** (interface card) or port **28** may be provided for connecting to outside devices, such as the network **30**.

[0033] Internally, a bus **32**, or plurality of buses **32**, may operably interconnect the processor **12**, memory devices **14**,

input devices **22**, output devices **24**, network card **26** and port **28**. The bus **32** may be thought of as a data carrier. As such, the bus **32** may be embodied in numerous configurations. Wire, fiber optic line, wireless electromagnetic communications by visible light, infrared, and radio frequencies may likewise be implemented as appropriate for the bus **32** and the network **30**.

[**0034**] Input devices **22** may include one or more physical embodiments. For example, a keyboard **34** may be used for interaction with the user, as may a mouse **36** or stylus pad **37**. A touch screen **38**, a telephone **39**, or simply a telecommunications line **39**, may be used for communication with other devices, with a user, or the like. Similarly, a scanner **40** may be used to receive graphical inputs, which may or may not be translated to other formats. The hard drive **41** or other memory device **41**, such as a CD ROM or DVD drive, may be used as an input device whether resident within the node **11** or some other node **52** (e.g. **52**, **54**, etc.) on the network **30**, or from another network **50**.

[**0035**] Output devices **24** may likewise include one or more physical hardware units. For example, in general, the port **28** may be used to accept inputs into and send outputs from the node **11**. Nevertheless, a monitor **42** may provide outputs to a user for feedback during a process, or for assisting two-way communication between the processor **12** and a user. A printer **44**, a hard drive **46**, or other device may be used for outputting information as output devices **24**.

[**0036**] In general, a network **30** to which a node **11** connects may, in turn, be connected through a router **48** to another network **50**. In general, two nodes **11**, **52** may be on a network **30**, adjoining networks **30**, **50**, or may be separated by multiple routers **48** and multiple networks **50** as individual nodes **11**, **52** on an internetwork. The individual nodes **52** (e.g. **11**, **48**, **52**, **54**) may have various communication capabilities.

[**0037**] In certain embodiments, a minimum of logical capability may be available in any node **52**. Note that any of the individual nodes **11**, **48**, **52**, **54** may be referred to, as may all together, as a node **11** or a node **52**. Each may contain a processor **12** with more or less of the other components **14**-**46**.

[**0038**] A network **30** may include one or more servers **54**. Servers may be used to manage, store, communicate, transfer, access, update, and the like, any practical number of files, databases, or the like for other nodes **52** on a network **30**. Typically, a server **54** may be accessed by all nodes **11**, **52** on a network **30**. Nevertheless, other special functions, including communications, applications, directory services, and the like, may be implemented by an individual server **54** or multiple servers **54**.

[**0039**] In general, a node **11** may need to communicate over a network **30** with a server **54**, a router **48**, or nodes **52**. Similarly, a node **11** may need to communicate over another network (**50**) in an internetwork connection with some remote node **52**. Likewise, individual components **12**-**46** may need to communicate data with one another. A communication link may exist, in general, between any pair of devices.

[**0040**] Referring to **FIG. 2, a** group **62** of objects **64**, such as digital photographs **64**, video recordings **64**, audio recordings **64**, text files **64**, and the like, may be sorted into one or a plurality of collections **66***a-e*. The sorting may be customized or personalized according to criteria **68***a-e* for each collection established by a user having, owning, or being associated in some way with the objects **62**. The user may establish various descriptive category sets **68***a-e* in order to classify or catalog each of the objects **64** in each of the collections **66**.

[**0041**] For example, a first collection **66***a* may contain digital photographs related to a particular event, such as a family vacation. Accordingly, a descriptive category set **68***a* may be used to categorize and index photographs **64***a*, **64***b*, for example, related to "vacations." Likewise, a second collection **66***b* may use a second descriptive category set **68***b* used to categorize photographs **64***c*, **64***d* relating to a holiday.

[**0042**] Similarly, additional collections **66***c-e* may be used to categorize other photographs **64** into logical groupings using identical or different descriptive category sets **68***c-e*. Each of the collections **66** may include photographs **64** in common with other collections **66** or each may contain photographs **64** unique to a specific collection **66**. In certain embodiments, additional collections **66***d*, **66***e* may be created from existing collections **66***a*, **66***b*, **66***d*. Each of these collections **66***d*, **66***e* may be characterized by unique descriptive category sets **68***d*, **68***e*, or may share a descriptive category set **68***d*, **68***e* with another collection **66***a-c*.

[**0043**] Referring to **FIG. 3**, one embodiment of a collection management system **72** may be embodied as software data structures to be executed or processed on a computer **11**. The collection management system **72** may include a collection generation module **74**, a collection editing module **92**, a searching module **104**, a classification module **114**, a CD creation module **124**, a database **144**, a database engine **145**, a slide show module **148**, as well as other modules **136**.

[**0044**] A collection generation module **74** may include a module **76** for creating collections **66**. For example a module **76** may provide a user the ability to name a collection **66**, select a descriptive category set **68** corresponding to the collection **66**, and import or scan objects **64**, such as photographs **64**, into a collection **66**. As photographs **64** are imported into a collection **66**, they may be identified or classified according to the descriptive category set **68** corresponding to the collection **66**.

[**0045**] For example, a collection generation module **74** may include a module **80** for classifying or categorizing photographs **64** as they are imported into a collection **66**. A user may initially select **68** a descriptive category set **68**, having categories and descriptors that the user deems most appropriate for a given group of photographs **64**. The user may also enter a caption **82** to each of the photographs **64** in the collection **66**. In certain embodiments, the user may also be able to enter an additional text description of any arbitrary length corresponding to a desired object, or collection. The caption **82** may or may not be independent from the descriptive category set **68**, selected to classify the group of photographs **64**. Likewise, a user may select other criterion **84** to classify any or all of the photographs **64**. For example, each photograph **64** may be assigned a date, may be linked to another media or other file, or be assigned some other identifying criterion **84**.

[**0046**] The collection generation module **74** may provide the capability to browse **86** or view **86** a collection **66** once

created. Objects **64** in the collection **66** may be viewed in any particular order, such as the order objects **64** were imported into a collection **66**, in order of size, date, date last modified, or by some other ordering method. In certain embodiments, smaller thumbnails of each photograph **64** may be displayed so a user may easily browse through a collection **66**. The thumbnail photographs may be created by a thumbnail generator **88** for each photograph **64** as it is imported into a collection **66**.

[**0047**] In certain embodiments, the collection generation module **74**, or some other module, may include an object labeling module **90**. For example, in the case of digital photographs **64**, a photograph **64** may contain details that may not be easily described using a descriptive category set **68**, captions **82**, or using another criterion **84**. For example, a photograph **64** of a family reunion may include many persons within the photograph **64**. A caption **82** or descriptive category set **68** may be inadequate to index or identify each person in the photograph **64**.

[**0048**] Therefore, an apparatus and method in accordance with the invention may provide the capability to label persons, objects, or other elements, associated with locations on the surface of a digital image **64**. In certain embodiments, this labeling information may be stored in another file separate from the digital image file **64**. The labels may be placed on or near each of the persons, objects, or items of interest. In certain embodiments, the labels may be selectively displayed or hidden so that a user may view the contents of the photograph **64** behind the label. In selected embodiments, the labels may be selectively displayed or hidden when a user moves a cursor over the corresponding object **64** identified by the label. The labels may provide the capability to label many items or persons of interest within a photograph, adding considerable information to a photograph **64** that may be viewed or searched at a later time.

[**0049**] The collection management system **72** may include a collection editing module **92** for editing objects **64** in the collections **66**. For example a module **94** may provide the ability to add, delete, modify, move, or provide some other editing capability of objects **64** in the collections **66**. In certain embodiments, a user may be able to edit **96** or enhance **96** particular objects **64** in a collection **66**. For example, in the case of photographs **64**, a user may be able to perform editing features such as changing the brightness, contrast, color, filters, tint, and the like, to photographs **64** within the collections **66**.

[**0050**] In certain embodiments, choosing to enhance **96** or edit **96** a photograph **64** within the collection management system **72** may automatically open an editing application, such as Photoshop, without having to manually exit the collection management system **72** software and manually open the editing software. In addition, when a user has finished using the editing application, a user may be returned directly to the collection management system **72** software in the same manner. An enhanced or edited photograph **64** may be saved directly over a previous unedited version, or a new enhanced version may be saved in the collection **66** in addition to the previous version. In selected embodiments, a user may be able to reverse editing changes made but not desired later.

[**0051**] In addition, not only may objects **64**, such as photographs **64**, be physically edited within the collection editing module **92**, but indexing information, such as captions **82**, indexing from corresponding descriptive category set **68**, labeling performed by a labeling module **90**, and other information **84**, may be edited **98**. The user may also directly edit **100** collections, such as by changing a name of a collection **66**, changing a corresponding descriptive category set **68**, deleting objects **64** within a collection **66**, or adding, modifying, or deleting a collection **66**. The user may also edit **102** an object's labeling, such as by adding, deleting, or modifying the labels, and the like.

[**0052**] The collection management system **72** may include a searching module **104**. A user may be required to define **106** a scope of a search. For example, a user may desire to search all collections **66** or may desire to search only individual or groups of collections **66**. Once the user has defined the scope of the search, a user may identify **108** a method of searching. For example, a user may search using keywords from object captions **82**, terms used to classify objects **64** using descriptive category sets **68**, or search using some other criterion, such as an object's date, size, name, file type, last modified date, or the like.

[**0053**] Once a user has established a scope and a method of search, a search may be initiated **110**. The searching module **104** may then display **112** the results of the search. This may include providing a list of names of located objects **64**, permitting a user to scroll through located objects **64**, providing a list of thumbnails of located objects **64**, or the like.

[**0054**] The collection management system **72** may include a classification module **114**. The classification module **114** may allow a user to establish and define descriptive category sets **68** in order to classify and categorize objects **64** within each collection **66**. A user may initially establish **116** a descriptive category set by assigning it a name or type. For example, if a user possesses many photographs **64** of his or her family history, the user may desire to name a descriptive category set "family history." The user may then define **118** categories within a descriptive category set **68**.

[**0055**] For example categories **118** within a descriptive category set **68** may include "people,""places," and "occasions." Each category may be helpful in describing photographs **64** related to family history. Within each category **118**, a user may define descriptors (e.g. values within the category). For example, under the "people" category, a user may include descriptors such as "cousins,""couples," and "children." Within the "places" category, a user may include descriptors such as "home,""back yard," and "park." Likewise, within the "occasions" category, a user may include descriptors such as "vacation,""holiday," and "family reunions."

[**0056**] Descriptive category sets **68**, once established, may be edited as needed by a user. For example, a user may choose to add an additional category **118**. Likewise, a user may choose to add descriptors within any or all of the categories **118**.

[**0057**] In certain embodiments, categories and descriptors may be selected from preestablished lists by a user. For example, a user may choose categories from a list of categories to include in a descriptive category set **68**. Likewise, a user may choose descriptors from a preestablished list of descriptors to include as values within a particular

category. A user may add to or delete from these lists of categories and descriptors as desired.

[0058] The collection management system **72** may include a compact disk (CD), or other type of computer-readable media associated with the creation module **124**. The compact-disk creation module **124** may provide a convenient process to export objects **64** from collections **66** onto a computer-readable medium for sharing, backing up, archiving, and the like.

[0059] In certain embodiments, the compact disk creation module **124** may provide a user the option to select objects **64**, collections **66**, or groups thereof to burn or copy onto computer-readable media. This may be accomplished by exporting **126** objects **64** or collections **66**, such as image files **128**, to a specified folder that may be burned onto a compact disk, or other computer-readable media, using appropriate software. In addition, in certain embodiments, the module **124** may export thumbnail files to the folder so a user may preview images **64** in a compressed format before viewing an entire image **64**. Indexing information **132** may also be exported to provide a user the ability to search the exported objects **64**, or images **64**, using the descriptive category sets **68**, captions **82**, and other criteria **84** that was previously associated with a particular object **64**, or image **64**.

[0060] In certain embodiments, viewing software **134** may be exported with the exported objects **64**, or images **64**, to provide a method for viewing the objects **64** and collections. The viewing software **134** may include a subset of the features provided by the collection management system **72**. For example, the viewing software **134** may allow a user to search and display the collections **66** or objects **64** on exported media. However, the user may not be able to create or edit any of the objects **64** using the viewing software **134**. The features included with or lacked by the viewing software **134**, compared to the collection management system **72**, may be adjusted as needed.

[0061] The collection management system **72** may include other modules **136** to perform various functions and tasks. For example, the system **72** may include an online user manual **138**. This may simply be a link to a web site on the Internet providing assistance for the system **72** or may download information as needed or requested by a user. This method may provide a convenient solution to provide updated assistance for the collection management system **72**.

[0062] In other embodiments, the other modules **136** may include a context sensitive help module **140**. This module **140** may detect features that a user is using at a time he or she requests assistance. For example, if a user is using the collection generation module **74** and is creating a collection **76**, selecting the context sensitive help **140** may automatically display a section of a user manual related to creating collections **76**. Likewise, if the user is using some other features of the collection management system **72**, the user may be directed to the appropriate section of a help manual or to other material addressing the user's issue. The context sensitive help module **140** may respond according to a screen a user is using or, alternatively, the module **140** may sense where a user is within a particular process and respond accordingly.

[0063] In selected embodiments, other modules **136** may include tutorials **142** to guide a user through selected processes of the collection management system **72**. For example, tutorials **142** may include video or audio recordings detailing methods of operation of any or all of the modules within the collection management system **72**. The user may also be led through a series of steps or be asked to respond to questions to assist in the learning process.

[0064] The collection management system **72** may include a database **144** to index and classify each of the objects **64** and collections **66**. The database **144** may be configured as needed to conserve memory resources and may be dynamically expanded or contracted as needed as objects **64** or collections **66** are added or deleted by a user, or as additional indexing information is added or deleted for each of the objects **64** or collections **66**. In certain embodiments, the database **144** may include tables **146** to store or index information. One will recognize that tables **146** in a database **144** may be configured and related in many ways to store information related to the objects **64** and collections.

[0065] The collection management system **72** may include a database engine **145** to interface with the database **144**. The database engine **145** may be used to store, retrieve, and query the database **144** as needed. In addition, a slide show management module **148** may be used to create slide shows of the objects **64** and collections **66**. Slide shows may be made up of objects **64** within a collection **66**, entire collections **66**, or objects **64** across several collections **66**. The slide show module **148** may be integrated seamlessly with the collection management system **72** so a user may create slide shows without being required to exit the collection management system **72**.

[0066] Referring to **FIG. 4**, an apparatus and method in accordance with the invention may be characterized by actions **152** that a user may perform and actions **154** that the collection management system **72** may perform in response thereto. For example, a user may choose **156** an appropriate collection type in order to classify a group of objects **64**. In response, the collection management system **72** may automatically select **158** a descriptive category set **68** that corresponds to the collection type and display, to the user, the categories and descriptors to classify the objects **64**.

[0067] Once the user has selected **156** a collection type, a user may create **160** a collection **66** by giving it a name. In response, the the collection management system **72** may automatically add **162** a record corresponding to the newly created collection **66** to a database table **146** listing existing collections **66**. The the collection management system **72** may then automatically create **164** a table **146**, or plurality of tables **146**, in the database **144**, corresponding to the newly created collection **66**, to list each of the objects **64** included therein.

[0068] Likewise, a user may choose **166** to populate the tables **146** created in step **164** with objects **64**. As the user populates the tables **146** with objects **64**, the the collection management system **72** may automatically create **168** a record corresponding to each object **64**. This record may be used to store indexing and identification information corresponding to the object **64**.

[0069] The user may describe **170** the object **64** in terms of the descriptors of the descriptive category set **68**, captions **82**, and other criterion **84**. The collection management system **72** may then automatically store **176** this information

in each record or may store the information in another table **146** or record that is linked to the record.

[**0070**] Likewise when a user searches for one or several objects **64** or collections **66**, the user may specify descriptors **120**, captions **82**, or other criterion **84** corresponding to desired objects **64** or collections **66**. The collection management system **72** may automatically navigate **176** and search **176** the entire database **144** without requiring the user to personally navigate the database **144**. The collection management system **72** may search **180** the host computer's memory **14**, as well as network resources **30**, and the Internet in certain embodiments, for objects **64** satisfying the criterion specified by the user.

[**0071**] Each of the steps **156**, **160**, **166**, **170**, **174** may be performed by the user in any order, or steps may be deleted or added as needed. Likewise, the steps **158**, **162**, **164**, **168**, **172**, **176**, **180** simply represent examples of certain embodiments of actions **154** that may be performed by the collection management system **72** in accordance with the present invention and are not intended to limit the scope thereof.

[**0072**] Referring to **FIGS. 5 and 6**, a process **190** for establishing descriptive category sets **68** may include initially selecting **116** names for each set **68**. For example, descriptive category sets **68** may, for example, be given names like "album,""family history," or "fun photos," as illustrated in **FIG. 6**. Once a name has been assigned **116** to a set **68**, categories **198** may be selected for each set. For example, with respect to the "album" descriptive category set **68**, categories **198** may be selected such as "people, ""occasions,""places,""recreation," and the like may be chosen to describe objects **64** described by the set **68**. These categories **198** may be selected **118** from a list **200** of categories. Categories may be added or deleted from the list **200** as desired by a user.

[**0073**] Similarly, each of the categories may include descriptors **202***a*, **202***b*, selectable **120** by a user, that define values within the category. For example, the category **198***a* "people" may include a list **202***a* of descriptors that define values within the "people" category. These values **202***a* may also be modified, such as by adding or deleting a descriptor **202***a* from the list **202***a*. Similarly, another category **198**, such as the "recreation" category **198***b*, may include corresponding descriptors **202***b* that define values within the category **198***b*.

[**0074**] Referring to **FIGS. 7 and 8**, a process **210** may be used to classify or categorize objects **64** in a collection **66**. For example, a user may initially designate **212** a name for a collection **66**. For example, a user may name a collection, such as "Summer of 1985" or "Family Vacation to San Diego." Once the user has designated **212** a collection name, the user may select a descriptive category set **68** to describe objects **64**, such as photographs **64**, to be imported into the collection **66**. For example, referring again to **FIG. 6, a** user may select the descriptive category set **68** named "Travel." Once the user has named a collection **66** and selected a descriptive category set **68** to described objects **64** within the collection, the user may then select **216** objects to enter into the collection **66**. For example, if a user possesses photographs **64** that are saved on a hard drive **16** on his or her computer **11**, the user may navigate to the location where the photographs **64** are stored and select **216**.

[**0075**] The user may then classify **218** the objects **64** according to the descriptive category set **68** selected. For example, referring specifically to **FIG. 8**, if a user has a collection of photographs **64***a-g*, the user may choose to divide them into one or more collections **66**. A first collection **66** may be organized using a first descriptive category set **68***a* and a second collection **66** may be organized using a second descriptive category set **68***b*. With respect to the first collection **66** and corresponding descriptive category set **68**, photographs **64***a*, **64***b*, **64***c*, **64***d*, **64***f* may be filtered through the categories **198***a-e* such as, for example, one related to transportation or vehicles. A first category **198***a*, in this example, may be labeled with an identifier like "vehicle" with descriptors **202***a* within the category **198***a*. Likewise another category **198***b* may be designated with another identifier like "make" with corresponding descriptors. Thus a user, may create his or her own descriptive category sets **68** to describe objects **64**, such as photographs **64**, that are unique to the user.

[**0076**] In a similar manner, photographs **64***d*, **64***e*, **64***g* may be sorted into another collection **66** using a distinct descriptive category set **68***b*. In this example, categories **198***f-j* such as, for example, the category "landscape," having descriptors **202***b*, and the category "season" may be used to describe outdoor photographs **64***d*, **64***e*, **64***g*. In addition, each of the photographs **64***a-j* may be designated with a caption **82***a*, **82***b*, as discussed previously, as well as with other criteria **84***a*, **84***b*, such as a date. Each of the objects **64** may be indexed and associated with the information, such as the descriptors **202**, the captions **82**, and the other criterion **84**, in a database **144**.

[**0077**] Referring to **FIGS. 9 and 10**, one of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that a database may be configured to store information in many different ways. For example, with respect to relational databases, tables may be organized and related to one another in many different embodiments. Thus, the illustrations of **FIGS. 9 and 10** describe one of many possible embodiments and are not intended to limit the scope of the present invention.

[**0078**] For example, referring specifically to **FIG. 9**, in one embodiment, a table **146** may be used to store a list of every collection **216** created in the collection management module **72**. For example, a user may have created collections A, B, and C, assigning a name **220** to each collection **216**. The table **146** may include additional columns **222** to store additional information **222** as needed to describe each of the collections **216**. For example, additional columns may be used to identify the author of a collection, the date a collection was created, the type of collection, and the like.

[**0079**] Other tables **147***a*, **147***b*, **147***c* may be used to store a list of photographs **64**, or objects **64**, contained in each collection **216**. Each photograph **64**, or object **64**, assigned to a collection **216**, may be given a unique index number **225** in order to eliminate or reduce the possibility that two or more photographs **64** or objects **64** are confused with one another. Each time a new photograph **64** is added to a collection **216** in the collection management module **72**, the next available number may be assigned thereto.

[**0080**] For example, tables **147***a*, **147***b*, **147***c* may be created to correspond to each of the collections **216**. A collection "A" may be stored in a table **147***a*. A table **147***a* may include a list **225** of all of the photographs in the collection **216**, each of the photographs **225** comprising a record **225** in the table **147***a*. The table **147**, corresponding

to each collection **216**, may include a column **224***a* where a unique ID number may be stored, a column **82** where a caption may be stored, columns **202***a-c* to store descriptors, a column **84** to store the date of the photograph, and the like. In addition, a table **147** may include other columns as needed to store other information corresponding to a specific photograph **64**, or object **62**.

[**0081**] Likewise, other tables **147***b*, **147***c* may be used to archive other collections **216** listed in the collections table **146**. Each of the tables **147***a*, **147***b*, **147***c* may be created dynamically upon creation of a new collection **216** by a user. Likewise, if a collection **216** is deleted, the corresponding table **66** may be deleted.

[**0082**] Referring to **FIG. 10**, in certain embodiments, text files **230**, **238** may be employed in accordance with the invention. For example, text files **230**, **238** may be used to define search sets **68** (descriptive category sets **68**), categories **234**, and descriptors **202** or characteristics **202** within each category **234**. A file **230**, such as a structured text file **230**, may be used to store information relating to each descriptive category set **68**. In certain embodiments, the file **230** may include search set **68** names as section names **68**. Categories **234** corresponding to each search set **68** may be stored as keywords **234** in each section **68**. For example, if a search set **68***d* is named "family history", categories **234** such as "people"**236***a*, "event"**236***b*, and "place"**236***c* may be stored as keywords **236** in a search set **68***d* entitled "family history."

[**0083**] In certain embodiments, characteristics **202** or descriptors **202** corresponding to each of the categories **234** may be stored in a file **238**, such as a structured text file **238**. For example, the category **234***d* "people" may include descriptors **202** such as "babies", "children", and "couple" corresponding thereto and stored within a file **238**. The descriptive category sets **68**, categories **234**, and descriptors **202** may be stored and structured in text or other types of files in may different configurations and the example described herein is merely intended to illustrate one of many possible embodiments. In other embodiments, any or all of the descriptive category sets **68**, categories **234**, and descriptors may be stored and organized within fields of tables in a database.

[**0084**] Referring to **FIG. 11, a** process **240** for searching for objects **64** located in collections **66** may include initially designating **242** collections to be searched. This may include specifying a collection **66** or a group of collections **66**. A search method may then be selected **246**. For example, a search method may include searching **248** for objects **64** using a descriptive category set **68**, searching **256** by caption, searching by some other criterion **260**, and the like.

[**0085**] For example, if a user chooses to search **248** using a descriptive category set **68**, the user may select **250** a desired descriptive category set **68** having corresponding categories **198**. The user may then select **252** descriptors **202** within any or all of the categories **198**, the descriptors **202** corresponding to a desired object **62**. The search may then be initiated and performed by the collection management system **72**.

[**0086**] Alternatively, a user may select **256** a caption **82** corresponding to a desired object **64**. A user may indicate a caption **82** to be searched or may simply indicate selected terms or portions of the caption **82**. The search may then be initiated and performed by the collection management system **72**.

[**0087**] In certain embodiments, the user may search **260** by indicating **262** some other criterion of a desired object **64** such as a date, file size, date last modified, file name, or the like. In other embodiments, the user may search using any combination of the steps **248**, **256**, **260** described hereinbefore. In addition, in certain embodiments the user may use different forms of boolean logic to perform a search of the objects **64**.

[**0088**] The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from its essence or essential characteristics. The described embodiments are to be considered in all respects only as illustrative, and not restrictive. The scope of the invention is, therefore, indicated by the appended claims, rather than by the foregoing description. All changes within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are to be embraced within their scope.

What is claimed and desired to be secured by United States Letters Patent is:

1. A method for deterministically classifying objects indexed in a database by a user thereof, the method comprising:

providing a database;

establishing, by the user, a set comprising a plurality of categories, each category of the plurality of categories being arbitrarily definable by a user to contain a finite number of descriptors selected arbitrarily by a user to constitute values within the category;

selecting, by a user, objects having attributes perceived by a user to correspond to the set, each object being uniquely identifiable by a user and identified by a unique identifier retrievable by a computer;

selecting the set corresponding to the perceived attributes;

creating a collection having a collection name and characterized by a type corresponding to the set;

entering objects into the collection by linking selected ones of the objects with the collection name by filtering the objects according to correspondence of the attributes to the descriptors; and

storing information selected to support indexing of and searching for the unique identifier of each of the objects in the database based on at least one of the descriptors, categories, and the set selected by the user.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising modifying the set to add a category in response to the presentation of a new object.

3. The method of claim 2, further comprising modifying the set to add a descriptor in response to the presentation of a new object.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein correspondence of the attributes to the descriptors perceived by a user is arbitrarily subjective.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein at least one object is selected from the group consisting of a digital image, a digital video recording, and a digital audio recording.

6. The method of claim 5, further comprising:

selecting a search criteria selected from the group consisting of at least one of a descriptor, category, and set, perceived by a user to correspond to an attribute of a desired object;

searching the objects according to the search criteria; and

retrieving objects to create a subset of the collection corresponding to the search criteria.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein objects in the collection are selectively available to be browsed by a user;

8. The method of claim 7, wherein at least one of the descriptors, categories, and the set, corresponding to an object in a collection, are selectively editable while entering the object into the collection, browsing the collection, and searching the collection.

9. The method of claim 8, further comprising assigning, to each object in a collection, additional information selected from the group consisting of a caption, a date, and an event.

10. The method of claim 1, further comprising modifying the set to add a descriptor in response to the presentation of a new object.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein correspondence of the attributes to the descriptors perceived by a user is subjective and arbitrary.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein at least one object is selected from the group consisting of a digital image, a digital video recording, and a digital audio recording.

13. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

selecting a search criterion selected from the group consisting of at least one of a descriptor, category, and set, perceived by a user to correspond to an attribute of a desired object;

searching the objects according to the search criterion; and

retrieving objects to create a subset of the collection corresponding to the search criterion.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein objects in the collection are selectively browsable by a user.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein at least one of the descriptors, the categories, and the set, corresponding to an object in a collection, is selectively editable while doing at least one of entering the object into the collection, browsing the collection, and searching the collection.

16. The method of claim 1, further comprising assigning, to each object in a collection, additional information selected from the group consisting of a caption, a date, and an event.

17. A method for locating objects unique to a user and indexed in a database, the method comprising:

establishing, by the user, a set comprising a plurality of categories, each category of the plurality of categories being arbitrarily definable by a user to contain a finite number of descriptors selected arbitrarily by a user to constitute values within the category;

providing a collection of objects having attributes indexed in a database, the indices corresponding to at least one of the descriptors, the categories, or the set;

selecting a search criterion selected from the group consisting of at least one of a descriptor, category, and set, perceived by a user to correspond to an attribute of a desired object;

searching a group of objects according to the search criterion; and

retrieving objects having attributes corresponding to the search criteria.

18. The method of claim 17, further comprising modifying the set to add a category to identify an additional attribute.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising modifying the set to add a descriptor to identify an additional attribute.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the correspondence of the attributes to the descriptors, categories, and set, is subjective and arbitrary.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein at least one object is selected from the group consisting of a digital image, a digital video recording, and a digital audio recording.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein objects in the collection are selectively available to be browsed by a user;

23. The method of claim 22, wherein at least one of the descriptors, categories, and the set, corresponding to an object in a collection, are selectively editable once the object is retrieved.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein the search criteria further includes information selected from the group consisting of a caption, a date, and an event.

25. The method of claim 17, further comprising modifying the set to add a descriptor to identify an additional attribute.

26. The method of claim 17, wherein the correspondence of the attributes to the descriptors, categories, and set, is subjective.

28. The method of claim 17, wherein at least one object is selected from the group consisting of a digital image, a digital video recording, and a digital audio recording.

29. The method of claim 17, wherein objects in the collection are selectively available to be browsed by a user;

30. The method of claim 17, wherein at least one of the descriptors, categories, and the set, corresponding to an object in a collection, are selectively editable once the object is retrieved.

31. The method of claim 17, wherein the search criterion further includes information selected from the group consisting of a caption, a date, and an event.

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